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His Hand Tied On Cuba in '60 Debate—Nixon

By Jim Lynn
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Richard M. Nixon believes he might have beaten John F. Kennedy in the 1960 Presidential election if he had been free to reveal the Eisenhower Administration's training program for a Cuban exile invasion.

The former Vice-President says as much in an article in the November issues of the Reader's Digest. He also appears to concede, if only tacitly, that his Democratic rival did not know of the training program when he accused the Republicans four years ago of being too soft on Fidel Castro's Communist regime in Cuba.

The challenge thrown out by Mr. Kennedy just before the fourth and last of his television debates with Mr. Nixon "forced me to make the most difficult and, as it turned out, the most costly decision of my political career," Mr. Nixon writes.

Mr. Nixon describes himself as one of the training program's strongest advocates, but argues that, "to protect the security of the program, I had to oppose Kennedy on his position of advocating that the United States openly aid anti-Castro

forces inside and outside Cuba."

The result, the defeated candidate goes on, was that "Kennedy emerged as the man who was advocating a 'get-tough policy' toward Castro. I was the man who was 'soft' on Castro—the exact opposite of the truth."

Mr. Nixon describes his efforts to learn whether Mr. Kennedy had in fact found out about the exile training program, starting from the knowledge that the Democratic candidate had already been briefed twice by Allen W. Dulles, then director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

"I immediately had a member of my staff call the White House on the security line to ask if these briefings covered Cuba. A member of the White House on the security line to ask if these briefings covered Cuba. A member of the White House staff indicated they had," the Nixon article says. The next sentence is in parentheses:

"(Several months after the election Allen Dulles was to state that his briefing of Kennedy had included Cuba but not the training program for Cuban exiles.)"

The debate in question took place on Oct. 21, 1960. Mr. Nixon charged in his book, "Six Crises"—published in March, 1962—that Mr. Ken-

neddy "was endangering the security of the whole operation" by calling for a Cuban exile training program.

Mr. Kennedy denied then that he had been told about the program, and Mr. Dulles backed him up. Fred A. Seaton, the Eisenhower Interior Secretary who made the call to the White House for Mr. Nixon, stuck to his story, but refused to name the White House source who told him Mr. Kennedy had been briefed about the exile training.

Mr. Nixon's Reader's Digest article does not say explicitly that he now accepts the Dulles statement. It does say, "At the time of the debate, however, and after checking with the White House, I had to proceed on the assumption that Kennedy had been briefed on the secret program."

The former Vice-President does not explain how his own position in the TV debate would have been affected by the alternative assumption: that Mr. Kennedy did not in fact know about the exile program. Presumably Mr. Nixon would still have been forced to keep silent about the program's existence in that case as well.